

THE CEA CRITIC

Formerly THE NEWS LETTER of the College English Association

Vol. XII — No. 2

Published at Amherst, Mass. Editorial Office, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Mass.

February, 1950

"I Must Reject" The New Criticism: A Deprecation

I concede the value of the New Criticism in the classroom; it certainly helps the teacher evade discussion of embarrassing social and political ideology. In all honesty, however, I must reject the basic tenets of this school of criticism, and for the following two reasons:

(1) Its failure to evaluate the worth of the theme of a literary work of art. As Eliot himself admits, "The greatness of literature cannot be determined solely by literary standards." Such a statement assumes, in part, the qualitative worth of the thematic content. And I understand that the quality of the theme is determined by the kind of attitude it develops, from which, in turn, action will sooner or later issue. Themes, however, may be evaluated not only in accordance with qualitative effects but also in accordance with quantitative effects. That is to say, some themes become more or less significant as they comprehend and affect more or less people. With regard to critical judgment and appreciation, the importance of the theme from these two points of view is, I think, apparent to anyone who considers himself a "realist." But because of this failure to consider the problem of theme as such, the New Critics evade the issues with which human beings are faced in real social, economic, and political situations and escape into their unreal world of symbolic art and symbolic action. This neglect of theme may be called the "Vacuum Heresy" of the New Criticism. This heresy is responsible for the second failure of the New Criticism.

(2) Its failure to treat art seriously. Because of its intense formalism, the New Criticism denies the importance of belief, doctrine, and didacticism. Asserting that art is autonomous and that it represents a unique kind of unverifiable knowledge, the school falls into the old-fashioned error of art-for-art's-sake, a heresy that had been discredited as recently as the Thirties. Must we go over old ground? Literature abhors a vacuum. It does communicate moral attitudes to living people and does affect their action. And I should like to know,

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ADJUSTING THE SIGHTS

Each association ought to have its particular character which does not compete with the character of other associations. For that reason I should not like to have the English Association try to present learned papers of the manner which is characteristic to the M.L.A. Nor should I like to have it turn over entirely to such critical discussions as are characteristic of the English Institute.

What seems to me particularly useful to the type of person who goes to our conferences as well as, or in place of, other meetings would be the problem of teaching. Therefore the Harvard conference discussion of various approaches to Walden was not only unique but invaluable. I should like to have something of this sort done.

One might even take up the question of basic courses in Freshman English. It seems to me that this was the original intention of the College English Association and the most valuable one. I suspect, however, that for one reason or another, the tendency of the meetings has been to come closer and closer to the manner of the M.L.A. Let us retain our individuality and develop that to the finest possible point.

Norman Pearson

Duke University

(Director N.E.C.E.A.)

And Amplitude of Mind To Greater Deeds ON ACADEMIC FREEDOM (A Digest)

Prof. Alan McGee opens his discussion of the subject of academic freedom and the college teacher of English by asserting that everything on the subject is quite obvious and has been said many times. But it is necessary to repeat once again the obvious if only as a matter of ritual. Yet the concept of academic freedom is more than a ritual even though it is accepted without question by all teachers. Time and time again, however, the lip service paid to academic freedom does not eventuate in action and the teacher sidesteps the issue, as in a recent meeting, by refusing to subscribe to a strong protest over breaches of academic freedom while still subscribing to the concept.

Discussions and explanations of academic freedom are excellent. But it is not a question of debate. Rather it is an absolute necessity

in a concept of liberal education and the liberal arts.

Our concepts of liberal education are usually focussed on the liberal arts college, but whatever is said about the college can be said just as readily about the university. First of all, liberal education cannot be indoctrination. Such a concept of authoritarianism comes from a lack of knowledge of young people. They will listen dutifully to the pronouncement of opinions and ideas and appear to be in full agreement. Yet they maintain always a certain skepticism toward what is "handed down" to them by the indoctrinational method.

The concept of liberal education as defined by Professor McGee is based on the derivation of "liberal" as found in the NED—"liberal, pertaining to the free man." The liberal arts are those

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(Regional presidents and program chairmen: Please keep THE CRITIC posted as to conference developments. Don't wait until ALL the details of the entire program are worked out. Send in information as it becomes available. In this way your meetings will get maximum notice in THE CRITIC).

Question Mark: Directions in the American Novel Today II. Looking Ahead

(Completed from January issue)

The Grapes of Wrath appeared in 1939, and it was, to all intents and purposes, not merely the masterpiece of the proletarian novel, but the end of it in the United States. For *Whom the Bell Tolls* appeared the following year; but it is not so much a novel of the class-struggle in the narrow sense of the word as an epic of Spanish republicanism—a blast against fascism. *Native Son* also dates from 1940. But while this has for its subjectmatter an oppressed and exploited race, the main emphasis of the book is not proletarian or socialistic. The irony of the book is directed rather against members of the employing class who provoke tragedies among the negroes by ill-judged sentimentalism in their effort to associate with them as equals. There have been novels since then about classes and races subject to discrimination,—Negroes and Jews, such as Lillian Smith's *Strange Fruit* and Jo Sinclair's *Wasteland*; but for the most part the slant is altogether different from that of proletarian fiction.

I do not mean to suggest that the proletarian movement left no trace on subsequent writing. No one since *U.S.A.* and *The Grapes of Wrath* could write about social and economical relations with the bland complacency of Booth Tarkington or Joseph Hergesheimer. What we call social consciousness has become a part of the regular equipment of the American novelist. But the distinctly socialist bias has almost disappeared from the typical work of the last decade.

And it so happens that, as we have seen, the last decade offers us a much shorter list of distinguished novels than the decade that preceded it—with its heated and heightened consciousness of class struggle. The novelists of the Thirties fulfilled the hopes of Cowley that they would espouse the cause of labor. But since 1940 we can hardly say that this is true. And two questions rise. What caused this decline in the novelists' concern with the class struggle? And what has taken its place to give direction to their writing?

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THE CEA CRITIC

Published at 534 Main Street,
Amherst, Mass.

Editor

MAXWELL H. GOLDBERG

Editors Emeritus

BURGES JOHNSON

ROBERT T. FITZHUGH

Published Monthly, September
through May

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Amherst, Mass.

(Official mail c/o College English Association,
11 Old Chapel, University of
Massachusetts, Amherst, Mass.)

Re-entered as second-class matter January
9, 1950, at the post office, at Amherst,
Mass., under the Act of August 24,
1912.

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English Association

our interested and dependable fellow college teachers of English. We have accumulated a fund of shared experience and a spearhead unit of enthusiastic, responsible associates that together, mean a great deal for the future of our profession.

We count on increased support and cooperation from an increasing number of our college and university teachers of English. We count on being informed as to significant new developments. We already have the medium through which these new developments may be made available to the rest of us. We already have accumulated momentum toward more and more precisely visualized goals; and we may rely on more systematic procedure guided (but not limited or dominated) by comparatively long-range planning.

We must now bend every effort to consolidate the gains made under Bob Fitzhugh's leadership, and then to make further advances. In the coming years, the College English Association should thus become increasingly useful to the strengthened "tonicity" of our profession.

And Amplitude . . .

(Continued from page 1, col. 3)

arts pertaining to the free man as opposed to the servile or the mechanical arts. They are those arts which teach man how to read, how to think, how to find the proper and effective medium to express ideas, how to place these ideas in the world in which he lives and to relate them to the past. The liberal arts provide the tools and ability to discern between the general and particular, the concrete and the abstract, fact and opinion. And these tools are found in the disciplines of mathematics, the physical and biological sciences, the social sciences, philosophy and the fine arts (including literature).

The free man is one who is liberated from prejudice, superstition, and ignorance. He must learn to face the dangers of these and to think about them for himself. Thus it is axiomatic that he must be free before he enters the ballot booth. In making his decisions the citizen must be liberal by knowing the consequences of his actions and their responsibilities. If he does not know these and is not a liberal man as a citizen, he is potentially evil and any resultant good from his decisions is only good chance and luck.

In connection with the concept of academic freedom, we as college teachers of English are professors. By this term we openly

state that we profess an understanding of the tools by which people reach truth. We must, therefore, maintain the respect of students, and this can be done only by giving them an assurance of our honesty. The students are uncannily quick to detect our honesty partly by our willingness to press to its ultimate any path which we think will lead to truth. Any other path or any other pressure is totally inadequate.

At present, we hear about people who wish to destroy the American way of life. It has many attributes found in the many superficial phenomena of our culture. But the only important one is that reason must be left free. At the founding of the University of Virginia, Jefferson insisted upon the necessity of this. Without the freedom of reason one can have no trust in argument or debate and our legislatures will crumble; without it there would be no point in the ballot box. From it have come all the other attributes which we call "the American way of life."

Related to this defense of the American way of life comes the question of the privilege of Communists, fellow travelers, and liberals to teach. It must be recognized that the teacher is a human being; that as a professor he has beliefs, and therefore, he must act. If a teacher is honestly persuaded by the Marxist hypothesis, he has three courses of action open to him: he may just believe and become "suspect," he may express some of his beliefs and become a fellow traveler, or if he is sincere he may join the Communist Party. To many, the professor's error is that by becoming a Communist he signs himself up for complete indoctrination and discipline. This may not necessarily be so. For we must grant that the Marxist may be one we must respect for sincerity and ability to think things through and to harmonize thought and action. It is even possible that the Communist professor may bring a breath of fresh air to an all-too-conformist faculty. We are, therefore, faced with the problem of daring to risk exposing our young people to this infiltration of foreign ideas. The traditional answer has been to say yes and to allow our young people to be exposed also to the sincere ideas of other members of the faculty.

The real problem is not with the fellow traveler but with the member of the Communist Party who may have surrendered his academic freedom. It may be possible for a Communist not to surrender to the "truth" of Moscow

but to maintain his intellectual freedom. It is on the adherence to academic freedom that the Communist professor should be judged. To provide judgment we see many attempts to pass preventive laws. But these present no clear-cut definition or line and may eventually lead to an inability to express any opinion whatsoever.

If the Communist professor is suspected of violating academic freedom, who is to judge him? Probably the judgment of the academic freedom of any teacher should be decided by those with the qualifications to judge—his fellow teachers and scholars. If we do not insist on this, the decisions will be made increasingly in the legislatures and boards of trustees and regents—groups of amateurs. Thus to judge properly, the legislatures and boards must get the professional advice of teachers and scholars.

In our conception of academic freedom, we allow people of all faiths to teach. We believe that the supra-rational faith of religion is valid. In the present situation we find ourselves in the position of considering a rational compulsion for the teacher as being invalid and a bar to teaching. If a board of scholars can judge if intellectual freedom, rational compulsion and sincerity have been surrendered, then the man must be let go. Benjamin Franklin said, "Those who are willing to give up essential liberty for temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety."

As we see the ease of authoritarianism to suppress academic
(Concluded on page 3, col. 3)

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A Lion by the Tail

The College English Association has now definitely emerged from the experimental stages of its post-war re-activation. In the first phase, those of us whom Bob Fitzhugh suddenly called to duty felt that we were taking arms against a sea of troubles, or trying to embrace a cloud. Later, we felt we had a lion by the tail; and we didn't know who was going to throw whom.

Now, if the lion has not been tamed (perhaps he should not be altogether tamed ever!), he is at least tractable and, to change the figure, works well in harness.

Throughout, we have stressed our functions, primarily, as teachers. We have been interested in scholarship and criticism, true—intensely interested in both—as a glance at our recent issues will quickly show. But we have had this interest chiefly as an incentive to our teaching and as a source of our personal enrichment, hence of our enriched services to our students.

Through THE CRITIC and our regional and national conferences we have become more and more sensitive to, and well informed about, the creative efforts among us—in creative scholarship, in creative teaching, in vital integration of these two complementary and mutually fructifying modes of cultural work and pleasure. We have come to know more and more of

Question Mark ...

(Continued from page 1, col. 4)

Obviously the second World War will furnish one answer to these questions. After '39 the imaginative energies of people in the United States were largely taken up with the world-struggle against fascism; and while fascism was at first identified by many people with the cause opposed to the working class, this was not so with most people, and it soon ceased to be so with many of those who took this for granted at the start. Fascism was identified with racism and with totalitarian dictatorship even more than it was with the suppression of labor unions. And totalitarian dictatorship and the police state were as much to be feared in the Soviets as they were in Germany, Italy and Spain.

For literary people the turning point in their feeling here may have been the reading of Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* when it appeared in 1941. Russia had been for many high-minded people the one practical demonstration that socialism was not a visionary dream. Early in the second World War, though Russia had become our ally in the fight with Germany, these people were losing their faith in Russia, and—without the support of this great example—many of them were weakening in their enthusiasm for the socialist ideal. At least they were beginning to distinguish sharply between Socialism and Communism, since the latter term was so closely associated with the dictatorship and police state in the Soviets.

(Continued in col. 4)

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I've Been Reading

Book Review Editor

J. Gordon Eaker

Jersey City Junior College

[Note: The book-review editor would like the names of members interested in receiving new books for brief reviews, not longer than 150 words. Unsolicited reviews, equally brief, are invited of new or old books of likely interest to members.]

Story—The Fiction of the Forties, edited by Whit Burnett and Hallie Burnett, editors of *Story* (Dutton, 1949, \$3.95)—Fifty-one stories, chosen from 600 by established writers and new discoveries printed in *Story* before its recent suspension, fill these 614 exciting pages. Young New York sophisticates, Irish peasants and immigrants, Midwestern students and lovers, 4-F's, UN diplomats, loyal domestics and unfeeling relatives, young loafers, out-of-door people, debutantes, Spanish villagers—all the human variety in its throbbing realism fill these pages with gripping emotion. Whatever else they have, these stories are all worth telling merely as yarns. The print is large, the pleasure abundant.

The Best of W. H. Hudson, edited by Odell Shepard (Dutton, 1949, \$4.)—Fourteen volumes, from *The Purple Land*, 1883, to *A Hind in Richmond Park*, 1922, yielded up 317 of their best pages to form this treasure of peaceful thought, interpretations of nature, and scenes from humble life. Whether he is adopting an orphan blackbird or watching elderly men gaze into eternity from Land's End, or retelling the tragedies of shepherds' lives on the downs near Salisbury, Hudson is a writer with the insight of Wordsworth or Burroughs and the artistry of Pater or Hardy. After reading a hundred pages, one feels once more at home in nature and resolves immediately upon more plain living and high thinking with this charming man as one's companion. Many thanks, Mr. Shepard.

Pemberley Shades, by D. A. Bonavia-Hunt (Dutton, 1949, \$3)—Based on a quotation from *Pride and Prejudice*, "Are the shades of Pemberley to be thus polluted?" (chapter 56), this novel by an English woman is a sequel to Jane Austen's masterpiece and will amuse all lovers of the original. The same characters with a few others continue mystery and comedy.

New Criticism ...

(Continued from page 1)

for example, if the ideas of Faulkner on the Negro, of Wolfe on the Jew, and of Pound on various matters of importance are not verifiable? Moreover, do not these ideas or beliefs, which I take to mean doctrine, affect the appreciation and judgment of the total work of art?

The deliberate exclusion of psychological and social effect (N.B. the use of the New Critic's pejorative term "affective fallacy") is unwarranted by the very nature of the psychological and social effect and didactic intention of a good deal of serious art. The dynamic and realistic view demands, therefore, that the possible and actual social products be considered as well as the art object itself. To do otherwise, is to fall into error—it may be called the "Heresy of Impersonality"—and to consider all art as an irresponsible game. In this connection, I may also point out that to the New Critics belief and conviction in the art are irrelevant to its full enjoyment. But the key word in this statement (taken from Elton's *Glossary of the New Criticism*) is full. Needless to say, it is a loaded word—loaded, that is, with the critic's prejudices—and objective criticism can very well do without it. Hence, to conclude, doctrine qua doctrine must be significant in the expression of literary values for it certainly contributes to the total esthetic effect (despite the fact that there may be agreement on only few doctrines).

As anyone can see, my reasoning is grounded on the social point of view, whose implications and attendant difficulties and dangers I accept and welcome. I must, therefore, reject the basic tenets of the New Criticism because, as they exclude consideration of social man

And Amplitude ...

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freedom, so as teachers of English we can all too easily become authoritarians in our views of English literature. Unconsciously we pass off on students an amazing amount of authoritative conclusions. Perhaps the best procedure is not to tell the student anything and therefore be sure of no authoritarian indoctrination. If we defend the liberal arts and ask for academic freedom, we must demand that students be liberal and we must find out once in a while if we are giving to students in their study of literature the tools to become free in themselves.

Arthur J. Monk
Boston University

Question Mark ...

(Concluded from col. 1)

And since the War, the process has gone on accelerating, as the Soviets forced their institutions and their rule upon the Balkan states and let down the iron curtain. We are probably not able to look on these events objectively. Our sources of information are partial and doubtless biased. We cannot be sure whether the Russian policies are primarily defensive or offensive. But the public manners of the Russians since the War have been very provocative. Stalinism is represented to us as a determined movement to subjugate the world politically as well as to convert it ideologically. And Russia is thought to be the chief example in the world of what socialism really means. The lines are coming to be drawn with all the rigor of mass opinion. Numbers of our writers have given up socialism as rats leave a sinking ship. Others have relinquished it on principle, because it is too difficult to maintain their enthusiasm for a cause that is associated in their minds with an enemy nation, or with the cruel and corrupt methods of the police state, or with the suppression of freedom, or with an unreligious mate-

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and related matters—all that may make art meaningful or "great,"—they are only diverting or evasive fictions useful in the classroom but scarcely useful anywhere else.

Martin Kallich

South Dakota State College

TREASURER'S STATEMENT FOR 1949

Balance as of Jan. 1, 1949 \$1,188.34

Receipts—1949

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Subscriptions	1,449.75
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Library Subscriptions	29.85
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	\$3,346.55

Expense—1949

Wages	\$1,246.90
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The CRITIC	1,119.50
Chapbooks	159.60
Postage	194.64
Annual Meeting	231.41
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University of Vermont Symposium on American Novel

(Completed from January issue)

III. I cannot leave off discussing the present symposium, however, without suggesting a few of the conclusions on which its participants seemed to agree. But I must add that I have formulated them from my own inferences and put them in their present form.

A. The symposium staff seemed to share the conviction that the period of literary revolt against the restrictions and hypocrisies of the 19th century—particularly restrictions on technical experiment and choice of subject matter for fiction—which began in the early 1900's and stimulated the literary renaissance of the 1920's, has ended in the 1940's in a period of inertia and stasis. Now that the time for discovering the new subject matter of the modern age, and the new literary forms and techniques with which to express it, is past, writers are left in great doubt as to what to say and how to say it. They are finding that the material of the age has been largely exploited, that most of the tendencies of modernism, as we know it, have been carried to their logical conclusions, and they have not yet found a suitable supply of new material nor a new movement to replace the one that has been exhausted.

a. This is mainly because the experience of the 1930's and 40's has not been sufficiently different in kind from the immediate past—at

least as far as major changes in the way of life are concerned—to give the writer a new perspective and, consequently, the stimulus to produce a new literature.

b. Rather, the period has been characterized by violent international upheaval. The experience of the age has been one of events rather than ideological change, and too many events have the effect of overwhelming writers, damaging their perspective, and presenting them with too many sides of reality, among which it becomes almost impossible to choose the most significant.

c. One difficulty is that without fresh experience present-day writ-

advanced scientifically far enough beyond Woolf and Joyce to know much more about the human mind or contribute much more to the literature of consciousness than they knew and contributed.

d. Almost all subjective writing has declined under the pressure of the events of the war years. Where such writers as Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, James Joyce, and Thomas Wolfe wrote some of their best books about themselves and their own unique experiences, most writers today have been so confused by the impact of recent events that they no longer know what they individually feel or how to judge what has happened to

COMPENSATION

Brickbats and Bouquets

THE CRITIC has slipped badly the last year or two. I hope you can bring it back to fulfill its intended job of helping writing teachers.

C. R. Anderson
University of Illinois

Query: But is that, and that alone, the intended job of THE CRITIC?

THE CEA CRITIC seems to me consistently intelligent, balanced, and stimulating.

Walter Havighurst
Oxford, Ohio

THE CEA CRITIC I find very stimulating.

Sister M. Rita Lewis
Saint Joseph College
West Hartford 7, Conn.

I like the magazine very much as it is.

Henry Seidel Canby
Saturday Review of Literature

I am sorry not to have been able to attend meetings of the C.E.A. I do enjoy THE CRITIC.

W. L. Dole
Hillyer College

ers are being forced to follow along in a tradition which was established before their time, and they are becoming increasingly aware of the triteness of the subjects and techniques with which they are required to work.

1. Naturalism was rather fully exploited by Theodore Dreiser and James T. Farrell.

2. Social consciousness, in the sense that the term was applied to the writers of the 1930's, has become quite dead. The dilemma of the sharecropper and the Okie, and of just about any present-day counterpart of theirs you can name, seems insignificant in comparison with the dilemma of all humanity under the threat of the atomic bomb.

3. Symbolism and the "stream of consciousness" technique were carried to their logical conclusion in the work of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce, and we have not

them. For the most part, they have been concerned with masses of experience, whole nations and armies—as have so many of the new war writers—as if they imagined they could find in sheer numbers a meaning for life which they could no longer find in themselves alone.

e. Since there have been almost no major changes in the American way of life since the 1920's, writers today are finding it increasingly difficult to discover fresh material in native folkways and culture values. If they were to describe the patterns as they still predominantly are, they would find themselves writing second *Babbitts*, *Main Streets*, and *U.S.A.s*. They have, in fact, found the stock situations of modern life so thoroughly exploited that they have had to emphasize out of all proportion to their true significance such themes as racial prejudice and homosexuality, themes which still

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have some possibilities as fictional material because they have not been used to excess in the past.

f. Current fiction has become increasingly journalistic and less rich in symbolic values. One reason is that life is becoming increasingly standardized, but perhaps a more precise explanation is that journalism enables a writer to present material without taking an attitude toward it or judging its significance, and the events of recent years have tended to rob writers of both an attitude and a standard of judgment.

g. The literary situation since the war has not been favorable to the production of good or new writing:

1. The country has been in a state of confusion and fear. World conditions have not been stabilized, and writers have not had the sense of security they need to write well.

2. The rise in publishing costs has prevented the large-scale publication of first novels which may not have a strong market appeal.

3. The little magazines, which gave most of the best writers of the 1920's their first break into print, are being kept from appearing because of lack of funds and the general public indifference to literary matters. Those that do exist are given over almost entirely to academic and critical writing and do not, as a rule, publish very much new fiction.

4. The religion of art movement which gave energy and a sense of mission to the writers of the 1920's is apparently dead. Writers today are consequently deprived of the stimulus and solidarity which such a movement would give them. Per-

(Concluded on page 6, col. 3)

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Question Mark ...

(Continued from page 3, col. 4)

realism. With American writers of today, the heart has gone out of their socialism—even in many cases out of their "social consciousness".

It is true that I do not find in any of our notable novelists a disposition to beat the war drums, nor to come to the defense of our industrial order as in itself an object of love and veneration.

So then, we may say, first, that the main energies that might have gone into esthetic pursuits were diverted during the past decade to the more strenuous and urgent world issues. And secondly, we may say that, during this period the sense of unity with the working classes has ceased to be a strong animating force for writers of fiction. Even the War itself would seem to have been presented in rather different terms from those in which Dos Passos and Richard Aldington and Erich Remarque presented the first world war.

It is very hard for me to generalize about our war novels and clearly distinguish a significant direction in them. Marquand's *So Little Time* was a rather conventional performance, with more bearing on the relation of fathers and sons than on any more public theme. John Hersey's *A Bell for Adano* is a pleasing and amusing picture of the American occupation in Italy. His American major with an Italian name is a perfect model of wise and humane treatment of the natives; his American general with an American name is a synonym for brass-hat stupidity

and want of humanity. Glenway Westcott's *Apartment in Athens* is a fine piece of work, though my Greek friends are sharply divided as to its faithfulness as a record of the facts. Psychologically, it is an intimate and sympathetic study of fine-feeling middle class people compelled to give their homes over to arrogant and supercilious German officers.

Last year saw the publication of three powerful war novels: *The Naked and the Dead* by Norman Mailer, *Guard of Honor* by James Gould Cozzens, and *The Young Lions* by Irwin Shaw. At least two of these, those of Mailer and Cozzens, were work of very superior

homosexual, with all his energies turned toward dominance over men, and with a frankly fascist view of human nature and government.

Cozzens' novel is not laid at the front but in a Florida camp for experiment in aviation. The characters include a magazine writer with a commission, and various officers, some representing the war office in Washington. Most of these are men of cultivation and intelligence, with decent ideals of conduct and a sense of responsibility. The general in charge of the camp is a brilliant and experienced flyer, but temperamental and apt to make mistakes in

The Greatest and Most Soul-Satisfying Work

I am one of those lowly but ever-optimistic beings—an instructor in English. Like all teachers, or at least MOST teachers, of composition, I lament the inability of freshmen to write clearly, vividly, and effectively; I mourn over their failure to recognize complete thoughts, and their weird spelling. There are days when I wish I worked in the convent laundries or kitchens, but like all English teachers really, I am entirely convinced that teaching English is the greatest and most soul-satisfying work.

Sister M. Rita Lewis

St. Joseph's College
W. Hartford, Conn.

quality, brilliant in characterization and well organized as to action and movement. And Shaw's book was above the average in competence and scope, though perhaps a trifle too ambitious in range of subject-matter.

Taking the three together, what do they show us in regard to present attitudes towards war, the world struggle, and human nature? In Mailer and Shaw, war is of course hell, and especially so for the enlisted man. In Shaw, the Jewish private, though suffering atrociously from race-persecution at the hands of his comrades and superiors, comes out very strong, as a result, one feels of his training under typically American institutions; the German officers, though good material humanly speaking, are hopelessly corrupted by the national ideals, and make a very bad showing.

In Mailer, the enlisted men are shown, with pitiless realism, as for the most part ignorant and self-centered drifters and ne'er-do-wells, and pains are taken to indicate how they were conditioned in early life to be what they are. But some the them, and especially the young Jew from Brooklyn, have heroic stuff in them, and come out well under the extreme ordeals of military action. On the other side are officers of assorted character, and at the center the general eaten up with ambition, a

policy. He gets into a lot of trouble owing, among other things, to the wish of certain negro officers to be treated as social equals, and he has to be protected by his devoted subordinates, and especially by a certain colonel, an older man selflessly devoted to his chief. These form a "guard of honor" for their general. The rather complicated plot is managed with great expertness and story-telling skill. The account of character and motivation is strong, convincing, subtly shaded and human.

As to what the book proves about its subject, it would be hard to say, unless it be the unwieldiness and frequent ineptness of the army machine in one of the many aspects. But this might be taken as applying to any vast and complicated organization, dependent as they must all be on the fallibility of human beings. It is a very fine book and very well deserves the Pulitzer prize which it received. But it does not give us a clear indication of directions in the American novel at this moment. And in general upshot, I think this must be said for these three war novels and, so far as I know them, for our war novels in general.

One clue to possible new directions in the American novel is furnished by the work of Robert Penn Warren. Warren is a distinguished poet as well as novelist; and in his poetry as in his

fiction there is a persistent concern with the problem of evil in the human soul. I say in the human soul rather than in society; for one realizes that Warren's main emphasis is not on the social conditions that predispose to criminal action so much as on the inherent corruptness of the spirit which makes men yield to the seductions provided within the framework of wrong social conditions. I do not mean to suggest that Warren is not concerned, like other writers of our time, with evil social conditions. I know him to be "socially conscious", as we say, in a high degree. But Warren belongs to the generation of those who were turning from the purely economic interpretation of social evils to interpretations based on some kind of religious premise (taking religious in the broadest sense)—from, as they would say, exterior and superficial aspects of the problem to interior and essential aspects. He is of the generation, that is, of T. S. Eliot, Allen Tate, W. H. Auden, John Crowe Ransom, though he is, to be sure, considerably younger than Ransom or Eliot.

Significant of his later trend is his first novel, *Night Rider*. This book appeared in the same year with Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle*. *In Dubious Battle* was the standard orthodox proletarian novel—a strike of organized labor, a Communist organizer, inflexible management determined to keep down labor costs. The subject of *Night Rider* is an industrial dispute; but it is a dispute between rival producers—between small independent

(Concluded on page 6, col. 1)

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Question Mark . . .

(Concluded from page 5, col. 4)
tobacco growers in Kentucky and the great monopolies. In their sense of injustice, the independent producers take to violent and criminal means of persuading their rivals; and the evil of the public means they take infects their very private character. In *At Heaven's Gate* there is a similar theme, only here the evil is on the side of the great financier with corrupt political connections. The evil spreads from this ruthless wilful man as a center to the members of his family and all his business associates.

In *All the King's Men*, the central character was somewhat modeled on Huey Long, and the story told is from the point of view of a young henchman who, believing that all politics are corrupt but that the boss at least is working in the interest of the masses, finds himself involved in degrading and dishonorable means of establishing political control. In the end he has a revulsion of spirit and repudiates the whole philosophy. In order to make intelligible the influence the boss exerts over his followers and the people of the state—indeed to make him a human being, Warren gives him some likeable characteristics and a certain strain of idealism at the start; and, on its publication, some critics very hastily jumped to the conclusion that the book is in a way a defense of what they called, in the style of the time (it was 1946), "fascism". They themselves exhibit the political bias of those who were inclined to label as fascist all persons who did not follow the or-

thodox socialist line. The novel is very far from having fascist or any sort of reactionary taint. It is a tragic study of the disintegrating effect on character of the Machiavellian principle that the ends justify the means.

These stories, then, are solidly grounded in the factual circumstances of our political and industrial life; but these factual circumstances are merely the gross substance in which are seen operating the moral or spiritual forces of good and evil. There is nothing in the stories to indicate whether, for Mr. Warren, these forces of good and evil are associated with any doctrines of supernatural religion. But in each of the later stories, he does furnish a point of reference in the attitudes of minor characters who are guided by orthodox religious views—Cass Mastern in *All the King's Men*. The purpose these characters serve is to present a point of view in which good and evil are not utilitarian concepts and merely relative to the ends sought by the characters, but are taken for absolutes from which there is no escape. The battleground is transferred from the exterior world of social action to the interior world of moral determination.

Robert Warren does not depend any more than Dostoevsky on his spiritual philosophy for the effectiveness of his fiction. He commands more resources of style and narrative technique, more power in the evocation of character, situation, atmosphere, than perhaps any writer since Faulkner. Perhaps he is to be taken as merely an individual case—a freak of genius—and not as an indicator of general trends that are likely to prevail. It is the philosophical kinship he seems to bear with many poets of our time rather than any sign of a following he has in fiction that leads one to wonder whether he may be a significant sign of the times. So far as I am concerned, that remains another question mark.

The American novel will doubtless go on following various special lines already well marked. We shall doubtless have other attempts to apply the orthodox methods of psychoanalysis, as in Jo Sinclair's *Wasteland*. We shall of course have studies of special groups, such as Miss Sinclair's second-generation Jews or Jean Stafford's Beacon St.

It is still the Southern writers who show the most of sensibility and poetic insight as well as the picturesqueness of folk speech and local color. In *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, Carson McCullers suggests the replacement of undercutting irony with tender and tra-

gic pathos, in its way suggestive of Sherwood Anderson; and the same thing is true of Truman Capote in *Other Voices, Other Rooms* and Eudora Welty in *The Golden Apples*. And in all of these much is made of the special sensibility of children. Elizabeth Spencer, in *Fire in the Morning*, gives a more feminine and more obviously idealistic treatment of people in a small Southern town than we have seen for a long time; and even Faulkner, in his *Intruder in the Dust*, has struck a softer and more hopeful note. In *The City of Trembling Leaves*, Walter Van Tilburg Clark has pictured the evolution of a musical genius, a sensitive soul reminding one of *Jean-Christophe*; but one feels that his work is more effusively sympathetic than intellectually penetrating.

All of these are relatively small and scattered voices. The really strong voices of the time are Robert Warren's, Norman Mailer's—possibly James Gould Cozzens' and Ira Wolfert's. And for literary phenomena as diverse as these it is indeed hard to figure out a common denominator.

So there is the last big question mark with which I come to you.

Joseph Warren Beach

In view of all the publicity given to government aid to scientific study and research, we are glad to read, in the schedule of the forthcoming Thirty-sixth Annual Meeting of the American Association of University Professors, that, on Saturday, March 25, the following will be discussed:

The Proposal to Establish National Scholarships and Fellowships and to Provide for Loans for Students in Institutions of Higher Education, Buell G. Gallagher (Philosophy, Theology, Ethics), Special Consultant to the United States Commissioner of Education.

Vermont Symposium . . .

(Continued from page 4, col. 4)
haps the most important function of the religion of art movement was to keep alive the young writer's belief in artistic values. Without it, he is more easily the victim of commercial exploitation.

5. The present Communist scare has led, in many literary quarters, to a temporary submersion of artistic purpose in favor of patriotic purpose. Critics are asking writers to present only the most favorable aspects of the American way of life to the world, to turn their art into an instrument of democratic propaganda. When truth ceases to be required of art, art ceases to exist.

(Concluded in col. 4)

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IV. In conclusion, I should like to say that the first symposium held last summer is only the first phase in what we hope will be an intensive and fairly long-range program of studies in the contemporary American novel. It seems to me that such a program is one of the best ways of impressing upon the universities, the novelists and critics, and the general public, the urgency of the need for a thorough re-exploration of literary values at the present time, if we are to have now and in the future a vital and significant American literature. John W. Aldridge
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